



THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BROOKLINE
OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
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February 6, 2014

To: Zoning Board of Appeals, Town of Brookline

From: Alan Morse, Chairman, Brookline School Committee

Re: The Residences at South Brookline I --Application for Comprehensive Permit

I am writing on behalf of a very concerned School Committee about how the proposed Hancock Village 40B project could affect the long-term capital expansion plan for the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB), a plan developed over the past several years to accommodate extraordinary growth in our student enrollments.

The School Committee voted the long-term expansion plan in September 2013, after receiving recommendations from a nine-month community-wide discussion of our enrollment crisis and space needs led by the Brookline School Population and Capacity Exploration Committee (B-SPACE).

B-SPACE's work, in turn, built on planning that began in 2008 when enrollments had been rising for just two years. At that time, the Town and Schools commissioned a Facilities Master Plan along with a demographic analysis to help us formulate capital plans for the next 10 years. That master plan, provided by MGT of America, predicted less growth than we subsequently experienced. In fact, our elementary population has grown since 2005 by over 1,300 students, or 35%, and we now reasonably anticipate approximately 874 additional incoming students *in the next five years*. Even with their lower estimates in 2008, MGT advised us to move expeditiously to expand all of our elementary schools.

Since then, we have successfully added space to accommodate a growth of 42 class sections in the elementary schools, some of which came from major renovation/expansion projects at both Heath and Runkle schools.

When our Kindergarten enrollments continued to grow, B-SPACE was formed to consider our options, including continuing to expand current schools, add a new K-8 school, or reallocate students to different schools with redistricting. B-SPACE's final recommendations reflected the constraints in Brookline's densely populated northern corridor: it is very difficult to substantially expand school buildings or to find an adequate site for a new structure.

The long-term plan voted by the School Committee, therefore, focuses on expansion of three of our K-8 elementary schools as well as Brookline High School. Specifically, the plans include

expansion at the Devotion, Driscoll, and Lawrence Elementary Schools – all three of which are centered in the area of the most significant current overcrowding – and at Brookline High School, which will grow from today's 1,800 students to a school of at least 2,500 given the children already enrolled in Brookline.

In order to finance this ambitious expansion plan, with school construction projects from now through 2022, the Town of Brookline is currently considering a possible tax override of \$14 million and a capital debt exclusion of \$5.3 million to fund PSB operating costs and the renovation and expansion project at the Devotion School. Those overrides, combined, represent property tax increases for existing homes of approximately 13.5%.

None of these plans incorporate the 40B project now contemplated at Hancock Village.

As you know, that project plans 192 new apartment units, including 28 four-bedroom units, another 28 three-bedroom units, and 70 two-bedroom units, with the remainder one-bedrooms and studios. The family-sized units alone could add as many as 200 students to our schools. What's important to point out, in addition, is that one-bedroom apartments (and even some studios) sometimes house families with children. One-bedrooms, for example, frequently have another room – either an “alcove” or a separate dining area – that in the experience of the public schools could be used as a bedroom by families eager for access to our school system.

The proposed development falls squarely within the Baker School's attendance district. A recent review and expansion of our “buffer” attendance zones concluded that there was no rational way to include Hancock Village in a two-school buffer, so Baker would have to absorb all the elementary student growth from this development.

Baker School now serves 754 students, approximately one third of whom come from Hancock Village. It is already in excess of its built capacity of 679 students. At 139 square feet of building space per student, Baker is now the second most crowded K-8 school in our system. (See Appendix A).

The B-SPACE report noted that both Baker and Heath schools have enough land to add classrooms (whether through modular units or other expansion) should enrollments in south Brookline continue to increase. The potential increases from the Hancock Village proposal, however, would require much more than the B-SPACE committee contemplated for either school. Consequences could be so substantial as to require a new school building entirely, perhaps splitting the Baker population into two schools (uniquely eliminating its K-8 structure in Brookline), or significantly redistricting current students across the Town.

Of equal concern is the potential impact of these additional students on the plans in place for Brookline High School. As mentioned earlier, we have forecasted that by 2022 Brookline High School will have expanded from its current 1,800 students to 2,500 students. (See Appendix B). As with the elementary school planning, we have been considering different solutions for the high school for some years. Last year, we engaged HMFH architects to present us with some concepts for how the BHS site could be expanded. Their analysis suggests that the BHS campus could be rebuilt to handle 2,500 students, but only with the loss of some gymnasium space and continued strain on common areas, neither optimal when one is serving more students. Others are

concerned that the increased traffic and parking required by that many more students and staff may be impossible to absorb at BHS's single location.

Accommodating 2,500 students will be a challenge, but should the Hancock Village development go forward, our estimate of 2,500 will be too low. That will fundamentally change the conversation about how Brookline can or would respond. In particular, it would force reconsideration of the need for a second high school, an option B-SPACE did not endorse, but one that may have to be back on the table for consideration along with other options previously deemed unattractive for Brookline.

Any of the options that would have to be considered for an even larger BHS come with significant costs to the Town and the taxpayers, potentially adding millions of dollars more to the taxpayer burden than is even currently contemplated. Clearly, this would far outstrip any new revenues generated from the 40B project's residential properties. More important, however, it would force dramatic and unwelcome changes in the configuration of and local access to our public schools, changes that will touch every family in the public schools, not just those in the Baker School district.

Surging enrollments have stretched our district's resources and demanded a timely approach to expansion that we have endeavored to meet with the plans in place. The additional student enrollment generated as a result of this 40B project will upend our long-term expansion plan, rendering it inadequate at best and compromising financial planning.

In short, the Chestnut Hill Realty proposal at a minimum overburdens our schools, and it has the potential to fundamentally disrupt the same school system that makes this development profitable. On behalf of the Brookline School Committee and all the students we serve, I urge you to consider this impact before allowing this proposal to move forward.

Appendix A: Elementary Schools Capacity vs. Enrollments

	Current Enrollmen t	Actual Capacity	Over/Under Capacity
Baker	754	679	+75
Devotion	840	752	+88
Driscoll	551	574	-23
Heath	518	553	-35
Lawrenc e	658	572	+86
Lincoln	565	437	+128
Pierce	782	634	+148
Runkle	560	616	-56

Appendix B: Brookline High School Enrollment 2005-2022

